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Policy and impact of public museums in China : exploring new trends and challenges

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Abstract: In a commercialised and globalised China, museum institutions are pivotal elements in public strategies to present and create national self-consciousness, insofar as their vast collections provide symbols of cultural identification on a national as well as an international level. This article will explore Chinese public museum policy and impact, firstly by describing the current status of the system as background information; secondly, by presenting the most recent trends in museum strategies and finally, by replacing the challenges and complexities of the museum system in a broader context. The analysis will draw from first hand material from interviews and informal conversations with museum professionals, small-scale visitor surveys as well as the most recent facts and figures, and it will be illustrated by examples and supported by secondary sources.

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Policy and Impact of Public Museums in China: Exploring New Trends and Challenges

by Sofia Bollo and Yu Zhang



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Yu Zhang has an M.A. in Cultural and Media Management from Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, France and a B.A. in French Literature from the University of International Studies of Shanghai, China. With experience in event management and publishing, she occupied different roles at the International Council of Museums (ICOM), where she worked as Head of the Communications Department between 2013 and 2016. Since 2016, she works as a museum consultant and in 2017 she founded Yu Culture, a Paris-based company that provides consulting to cultural institutions on their China-related projects and partnerships. She lectures on Chinese museums and trends in the Chinese cultural sector regularly.

In China, one of the main roles of museums is to provide a 'patriotic education' through the commemoration and celebration of Chinese history.

In a commercialised and globalised China, museum institutions represent pivotal elements in public strategies to present and create national awareness and identity, insofar as their vast collections provide symbols of cultural identification. Chinese legislation identifies one of the main roles of museums as 'a basis for patriotic education' through the commemoration and celebration of Chinese history. The aim is to promote Chinese heritage on both a national and an international level. Despite the many intellectual and scholarly efforts at interpreting Chinese history, the fact is that provincial, regional, and increasingly commercial and private interests, guide most decisions on public historical displays.

Museums in contemporary China are undergoing a reconfiguration of policies in order to adapt to the needs of the market economy, for which new legislation is attempting to pave the way. In the programmes that Chinese museums develop, the need to comply with the different missions of museums (as defined by ICOM) is doubled with Chinese political directives, among which *The Internet + Chinese Civilisation* and *Let cultural relics tell their stories*. Meanwhile, new joint projects in the museum and heritage sectors, constant technological advancements, international exhibitions and cultural exchanges are increasing—less as a need for economic sustainability than as a means to establish Chinese cultural diplomacy.

This article will explore current museum policy in China and its impact in Chinese museums, with a focus on public museums, in order to better highlight the trends and challenges brought about through cultural policy. The analysis will be based on facts and figures illustrated by case studies, and supported by the use of first-hand material from interviews and informal conversations with museum professionals, as well as small-scale visitor surveys.

Background

Over the past decade, the number of museums in China has grown exponentially, with an average of one new museum every day. Three distinctive monographs, published in 2014, are dedicated to contemporary museums in China: Kirk Denton (2014) describes the political and propaganda role of museums in China in his study on their representation of the past, Marzia Varutti (2014) has undertaken a thorough study of representation practices in heritage policy and nationalist narratives with valid cases of ethnic minorities displayed in museums, and the analysis of Tracey Lu (2014) focuses on notions of identity materialised through museum collections in China.¹

The first legal document to set up the framework for the ownership of all archaeological objects was issued in 1930 under the Law on the Preservation of Ancient Objects (古物保存法, *guwu baocun fa*). It also regulated the registration system of private collections and artefacts trade (Li 1996). In Mao's China, the politics of display operated as a state in power and as a state in revolution (Ho 2017). Since China's outward-looking vision, which led to the Reform and Opening-up in 1978, the number of museums grew steadily and, by 1980, approximately 365 museums existed in China (Lü 2004). In the 1990s, a thousand more museums were established and consequently legislation on museums and specific treatises on museology flourished (Lü 1995; Wang 1990; Wenhuaabu wenwuju 1985).

The role of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage

The current Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics (文物保护单位, *wenwu baohufa*, hereafter Cultural Relics Law) was promulgated in 1982 during the National Congress, and recently amended at the 14th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Twelfth National People's Congress on 24 April 2015 (SACH 2015b). The State Administration of Cultural Heritage (国家文物局, *guojia wenwuju*, SACH) within the Ministry of Culture regulates the value of both material culture and most public museums. According to this legislation, movable heritage objects (文物, *wenwu*)—a Chinese term often translated into English as 'cultural relics'—are categorised into four grades of value, from Grade 1, 'most rare and valuable' to Grade 4, 'ordinary' (Lau 2011).

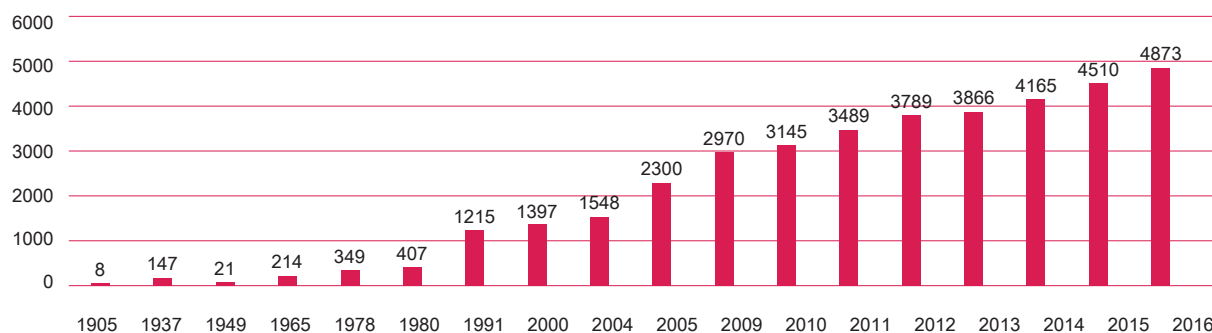


Fig. 1. The number of museums in China (1905-2016). © State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH)



Fig. 2. Queues outside the Shanghai Museum for an exhibition during the Chinese New Year in 2017. © YZ / Yu Culture

The same body also breaks down Chinese public museums into three categories: the best museums are classified as First, Second or Third Grade. This hierarchy of public museums is established according to quantitative criteria related to general management, facility, collection management, research, exhibitions and public services. This classification method, which was introduced in 2009, is used to distribute public funding to museums throughout the country. A re-evaluation of public museums takes place every four to five years and museums can be downgraded if deemed inconsistent with government criteria.

In 2012, after the first evaluation, 100 museums were ranked First Grade, 222 Second Grade and 438 Third Grade. According to the latest evaluation in 2016, there are currently 130 museums ranked First Grade (four were downgraded in 2013 and 34 were promoted to First Grade). It is to be noted that there is no clear distinction between the terms 'public' (公立, *gongli*) and 'state-owned' (国有, *guoyou*) museums within legal documents at the moment and the two terms are used interchangeably. The number of museums evaluated is insignificant compared with the overall number of museums in China (Fig. 1). SACH is expected to evaluate all public museums in order to create a benchmark and a standard on museum collection, facility and management.

International partnerships

Another conservation charter was initially developed through a collaboration that began in 1997 between SACH, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) and the Australian Heritage Commission as institutional partners, which ended in 2000 with the creation of the Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (中国文物古迹保护准则, hereafter the China Principles). The China Principles were finally issued by the Chinese National Committee for the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and approved by SACH in 2000. It took 10 years to implement the Principles, and in 2010 the Chinese ICOMOS committee began a revision of the document, which was completed in 2015 (ICOMOS China 2015).

According to the Mid to Long-Term Museum Development Plan (2011-2020), China intends to open one museum per area of 250,000 inhabitants in order to cover the maximum population in terms of cultural offer, hosting 30,000 temporary exhibitions and attracting one billion visitors annually by 2020. As of 2016, there are 4,873 registered museums in China, 363 more than the previous year, 1,297 of which are private museums, accounting for almost one third of the country's total (Mengjie 2017). In 2016, some 30,000 temporary exhibitions were held in museums and cultural institutions, and the current quota is already one museum per 330,000 inhabitants (Figs. 1 and 2). Chinese public museums registered 900 million visitor entrances, which is an 8.7 per cent increase from the previous year (Ning 2016).

Museums flourishing

The opening of new museums can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, the development of museums in China is the result of favourable measures in terms of financial and cultural policy. These incentives were accompanied by other initiatives: i) local councils started looking to the Bilbao model to attract tourists with new cultural landmarks through the extension of existing museums; ii) the opening of trade or industrial museums by (former) state-owned companies, and iii) the inauguration of specialised museums, e.g. science and technology, natural history, art, contemporary art, folk art, ethnology, industrial heritage, 21st century heritage, intangible heritage, as well as the multiplication of private museums.

The increase in the budget allocated to culture was pivotal for the growth of museums. Some 140 billion CNY (21.7 billion USD) in public funds were allocated to cultural heritage protection from 2011 to 2015. In addition to central government support, public museums also received subsidies from local government, while private museums can apply for local government funding on a project basis. Museum development is also due to an increase in archaeological excavations: new archaeological discoveries often lead to the establishment of site museums. By 2006, SACH listed a total of 2,351 archaeological sites and historical monuments as National Major Heritage Protection Units.



Fig. 3. Wuzhen has evolved from a water town to a popular and authentic tourist destination, making it a model for other Chinese villages.
© YZ / Yu Culture, 2017

If 'musealisation' is understood as the operation of 'trying to extract, physically or conceptually, something from its natural or cultural environment and giving it a museal status, transforming it into a *musealium* or "museum object", that is to say, bringing it into the museal field', it can be argued that China is currently undergoing a 'musealisation' process (Desvallées and Mairesse 2010, p. 50). The soft power of museums to attract audiences, investments, tourists and economic development is definitely a key element in understanding the musealisation of China. One of the most influential strategies implemented in order to attract a wider public was free admission policy.

Encouraging visitor attendance

From 2009 onwards, visitors enter without paying in all 1,804 state-owned museums. Over 120 Chinese museums have over one million visitors per year, mainly due to this free admission policy. In 2015, 3,717 museums, including state-owned, professional and private museums, have started offering free admission to the public. State-owned museums receive national subsidies, as an economic contribution to compensate for a lack of earnings due to free admission.

The increasing number of museums and free admission policies were also intended to draw the Chinese middle-class to museums, an affluent and well-educated population seeking ways to return to their roots through the arts and culture by attending exhibitions and joining educational activities. In addition, this development provided ideological tools for the 'Chinese Dream'.² The value of heritage has also been applied to local economic development through the promotion of cultural tourism. Tourism is developing as a leisure activity within an expanding economic industry, as will be discussed later in the article.

A notable example of musealisation and cultural tourism can be found in the 2016 No. 1 Central Document, an annual report on developments in key policy published by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council (MOA 2016). In this report, the government emphasises the importance of preserving historic settlements and building 'beautiful and liveable villages', which led to the revitalisation of Chinese traditional villages. Prominent Chinese architects have been involved in these projects to advise on the consolidation of old houses, re-planning of the villages and creation or repurposing of spaces, especially for community and cultural activities.

This requires that the villagers' needs be taken into account throughout the whole process. Such projects were launched even before the government directives were made official. For example, in Henan Province, a Cereals and Oils Museum and Village Activity Centre was created. Some villages opt for cultural tourism, in the hope that attracting visitors, whether domestic or foreign, will help create jobs and generate income.

The Wuzhen Model is one example. With its international arts festival, attended by renowned contemporary artists, Wuzhen, a town of around 60,000 people in the eastern province of Zhejiang, has become a talking point. (Fig. 3). Following years of infrastructural renovation that began in 1999, Wuzhen is now home to a rich artistic community and even hosts a number of high-profile events, including a contemporary art festival, a theatre festival, and the World Internet Conference (Zheng and Wang 2012).



Fig. 4. Chinese museums have developed merchandising lines. © YZ / Yu Culture

New trends

Museums in contemporary China have been recently undergoing a policy reconfiguration to adapt to the needs of the dynamic market economy, alongside reconceptualisation of cultural heritage values (Blumenfield and Silverman 2013; Evans and Rowlands 2015; Shepherd and Yu 2013). In the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan (2015-2020), ‘cultural industries’—a term first introduced in a central policy document in 2010’s Eleventh Five-Year Plan—are expected to become a pillar in the national economy in the next five years.

The revised Cultural Relics Law came into effect in 2015 (SACH 2015c). The amendments set the foundation for the professional management of museums, encouraging them to diversify their income resources by collaborating with private entities and by setting up boards of trustees. Another novel reform is that authorisation is no longer needed to create a museum. However, newly opened museums need to be registered after their creation, especially if the term ‘museum’ is intended to be used in their name. SACH is adding more regulations with regard to the creation of non state-owned museums and requires local heritage institutions to coordinate the creation of new museums (Wenbozaixian 2017).

The Thirteenth Five-Year Plan

As part of the Key Tasks for State Administration of Cultural Heritage in 2017, under the country’s Thirteenth Five-Year Plan, an annual evaluation system will take into account the protection of cultural heritage at local levels, and local authorities will be held accountable for negligence, if they fail to protect cultural heritage.

In the Five-Year Plan, other measures include:

- encouraging the cultural creativity industry (so far, income from museum shops and products represents 10 per cent of the global income of museums);
- increasing employment and the number of qualified museum workers in the cultural heritage sector;
- increasing protection of immovable cultural heritage and establishing a compensation scheme for cities abundant in such cultural resources and for private collectors who want to conserve their valuable objects;
- stressing preventive conservation;
- encouraging more social involvement in the cultural sector economy.

The lagging development of cultural products until recently results from a number of factors: for instance, public museums in China are required to operate on a not-for-profit basis. In addition, investment in developing cultural products was not covered by government funding and most museums in China did not include this expense in their operating budgets. At the same time, museums fail to exploit their collections and undertake market research to develop interesting products.

A youth-oriented museum experience

To support organisations in developing cultural products, the State Council has issued general guidelines for several departments, including the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Finance. This document encourages national and regional cultural organisations (including museums, art museums, libraries) to experiment with cultural products and allows them to set the prices of these products, to license intellectual property and to establish commercial enterprises to manage cultural products. On a national level, the other general directives that are to be applied to museums are: *Internet + Chinese Civilisation* or *Let cultural relics tell their stories* (Su 2017). Museum games or mobile applications, merchandising products inspired from museum collections as well as edutainment are among many examples of how museums comply with the *Internet + Chinese Civilisation* and *Let cultural relics tell their stories* directives (Fig. 4).

Chinese museums are required to adapt to the needs of the dynamic market economy, alongside a reconceptualisation of cultural heritage values.



Fig. 5. A visitor engaging with a hologram interaction video in Banpo Site Museum, 2015. © Sofia Bollo

By connecting with a young and internet-savvy public, museum games and mobile applications seem to be particularly popular: the Palace Museum has developed several games and applications for its permanent collection, temporary exhibitions and education programmes. With more than 8,700 types of cultural products generating more than one billion CNY (144 million USD), the Palace Museum has become the pioneer in connecting its centuries-old collection to the public. Other museums have followed the trend by inviting designers or associating with existing brands to explore their vast collections and improve their narrative skills through digital technology and merchandising. While free admission policy and the annual evaluation of museums have both discouraged museums to charge for their permanent collections, they have achieved revenue diversification by complying with market needs through merchandising (Fig. 5).

The Thirteenth Five-Year Plan also includes measures to enhance the protection of cultural heritage and its promotion overseas in all channels and at all levels. Several high-level government meetings were held since the outlining of the plan, while top Chinese officials including President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang also stressed the importance of cultural heritage protection and international cooperation (Wang 2016). In July 2016, the Chinese Museums Association, a government-organised NGO (or GONGO) supervised by SACH, created an online platform to facilitate the exchange of information among museum networks.³ It is ‘a bridge between Chinese museums and their international partners for exhibition exchanges’ (Chinese Museums Association Exhibition Exchange Platform 2016). The platform introduces Chinese exhibitions to the world and showcases international exhibitions for Chinese museums, nurturing international dialogue by encouraging more Chinese artefacts to be shown in foreign institutions via a ‘China in Cultural Relics’ programme.

Incentives for tourism development

The material and symbolic significance of museums have international value in terms of tourism, conservation/preservation and cooperation interest. For example, in Shaanxi Province, which is regarded as an ‘important archaeological region’, a Cultural Heritage Promotion Centre coordinates international relations for all institutions in the province. A dedicated team manages object loans for international exhibitions, mainly the Terracotta Warriors international travelling exhibition. A museum educators’ network has also been set up recently to share best practices. In addition, every year the ICOM International Training Centre for Museum Studies (ICOM-ITC) organises workshops for museum professionals managed and housed at the Palace Museum in Beijing.



Fig. 6. The Chinese Museums Association hosted a showcase booth about heritage on the Silk Road as its response to supporting the OBOR initiative, during its conference in 2016. © YZ / Yu Culture

A clear example of how culture and heritage play a role in international cooperation is also illustrated in the Silk Road, a ‘cultural route’ that enabled cultural exchanges and a shared heritage. Its most recent reworking in international diplomacy is called ‘One Belt, One Road.’⁴ Launched in 2013, this geopolitical initiative is also entangled with cultural diplomacy (Sidaway and Woon 2017). Nurturing a sense of shared history in specific regions creates political and economic cooperation and mutual loyalty (Fig. 6). Scholars believe that ‘heritage diplomacy’ will increasingly allow for the reshaping of history, trade, infrastructures and even security across countries (Winter 2016).

New museums, cultural heritage protection projects, exhibitions, festivals and intangible heritage initiatives can all apply for the Silk Road Fund, a state-owned investment fund founded in 2014. Notable examples include a joint excavation mission between Chinese and Uzbekistani archaeologists since 2012. This is China’s largest archaeological project in a foreign country. The mission is coordinated by the relevant academy of Social Sciences in each country, and a museum is planned near the archaeological site.

These new trends, domestic directives, international joint exhibition projects and cultural exchanges for the museum and heritage sectors, together with constant technological advancements and financial strategic incentives, are implemented to a greater extent, responding to a need to establish cultural rather than economic diplomacy for China.

Nurturing a sense of shared history in specific regions creates political and economic cooperation, and mutual loyalty.

Challenges

There are limitations to the current Chinese museum system reflected in the emerging trends described above. Indeed, public museums and tangible cultural heritage are under the supervision of a hierarchical and centralised state administration (Fig. 7). There is a geographical hierarchy of Major Heritage Protection Units, divided into three levels within SACH: National, Provincial, and Municipal/County Major Heritage Protection Units.

As Figure 7 shows, cultural heritage authorities managed less than two-thirds of Chinese museums in 2014. Public museums and cultural institutions, depending on their history and type of collection, often answer to different ministries and authorities, both nationally and locally. On an international level, in addition to the programmes undertaken directly by museums, the many overseas Confucius Institutes (managed by the Ministry of Education), the culture section of Chinese embassies (by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), as well as overseas China Cultural Centres (by the Ministry of Culture), can carry out cultural exchange activities. The segmentation sometimes results in ambiguous managerial conditions and therefore a lack of coordination in cultural diplomacy (Lai 2015; Zan and Bonini Baraldi 2013).

Overlapping responsibilities, segmented management across various government and local agencies, or blank areas represent a major challenge for Chinese museums. For example, art museums, which fall into different categories depending on their collection, are managed differently according to their location; furthermore, there are specific museums administered directly or indirectly by the Chinese Central Military Commission, such as the Chinese Aviation Museum and the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution. University museums present a notable dilemma: they do not hold a legal entity and depend on specific universities—which are placed under the Ministry of Education in most cases—that are in general not familiar with museum matters and do not assign them with a dedicated permanent staff. They seldom benefit from support offered to 'cultural heritage museums' and do

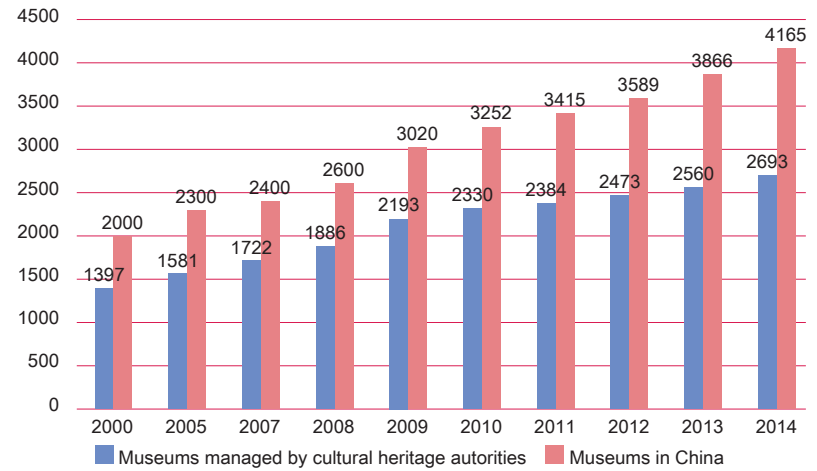


Fig. 7. Number of museums managed by cultural heritage authorities (2000–2014).
© State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH)

not enjoy fiscal benefits such as tax reduction for the acquisition of museum collection.

External partnerships

Other actors involved in the museum system include NGOs, and GONGOs: the powerful Chinese Association for Science and Technology, with its hundreds of societies, directly or indirectly manages the science and technology museums, botanical gardens, observatories, etc. Meanwhile, some of the most important museums in China answer directly to specific Ministries: for example, the Palace Museum, the National Museum and the National Art Museum report directly to the Ministry of Culture, and the Geological Museum of China to the Ministry of Land and Resources.

By contrast, most of the state-owned provincial museums are managed locally or regionally, where Chinese provinces tend to compete for financial resources and cultural pride. This apparent separatism of singular provincial cultural institutes, particularly in archaeological institutions, can be as well considered as a means to gain particular support and legitimacy from the central government, in what has been called a 'regionalist paradigm' (Falkenhausen 1995).

In China, traditional concepts of history and civilisation are moving towards different functional and educational goals.

In the most recently revised version of *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal (2015) extensively covers various modalities and reasons why the past can be made relevant in the present. The recovery, preservation, commemoration and fabrication of the past are some of the most relevant attitudes observed in China. Museums and exhibitions act as the validation and regulation of cultural heritage and thus promote a vision of nationalism, enjoy a range of institutional and didactic endorsements, and have become sites for ideological assertion (Denton 2014; Lu 2014; Varutti 2014).

Making education a priority

In the Cultural Relics Law enforced in 2015, education appeared again as one of the main functions of museums (Wang 2004).⁵ Currently the articulation of the pedagogical role states that museums will teach and educate people under specific modalities, i.e. through the commemoration and celebration of Chinese history, so as to promote Chinese heritage, both on a domestic level and an international one in order to revive cultural nationalism (Guo 2007).

Museums are authorised to interpret national history, make a selection and create a representation of the society for the society (Bennett 1995). In China, traditional concepts of history and civilisation are moving towards different functional and educational goals; these exploit the past and multiculturalism as tools for establishing new nationalistic features of Chinese cultural identity that is then promoted and enshrined in comprehensive Chinese public museums (Bollo 2017).



Fig. 8. The Shanghai Cohesion Project Museum is a 'basis of patriotic education'. Opened in 2013, propaganda about the care of the party and the government of the population is shown through archives, photos and objects. © YZ / Yu Culture, 2016

Present-day Chinese nationalism includes the glorification of cultural remnants of the past in a form of new antiquarianism, which become instrumental in nurturing patriotism and promote the enjoyment of cultural consumerism and leisure activities (Falkenhausen 2014). The soft power of museums inevitably affects the social and cultural alignment of people, has an impact on actions and ideas about what is worth remembering, and might be the cause of potential censorship. In China nowadays, museums remain an important part of the active expression of values and the dissemination of state ideology, which required them to adjust accordingly (Fig. 8).

Setbacks: visitors' perspectives

Museums in China are effective potential education tools. A small survey conducted in 2015 on a selection of public museums in China has shown that visitors generally have a positive attitude towards the exhibition content and messages. Nevertheless, many complaints were registered about museums being too crowded and negatively affecting the overall museum experience (Bollo 2017). This is another big challenge brought forward by the free admission policy. In order to overcome the downside of the free admission policy, many museums in China have therefore decided to set an upper limit for daily visitors. For instance, the Palace Museum has limited

its daily visitor number to 80,000 and was the first to decide on a specific closing day each week, to undertake restoration and reparation work otherwise impossible with the constant visitor flow.

Alongside the Chinese government's effort to promote nationalism, commercial and private interests increasingly dictate measures on most public displays. The foreword to the China Principles states that:⁶ *China is employing a new model for the establishment of these [archaeological] sites based on archaeological research that balances conservation and use, provides for a site's interpretation and presentation, protects the interests of various stakeholders, and is beneficial for developing tourism and improving the lives of the local community (ICOMOS China, 2015, p. 54).*

Investment, commodification and cultural heritage preservation

Compared to the Cultural Relics Law, the China Principles lay stronger emphasis on the economic value of cultural heritage. This assertion encouraged the growth of more Public-Private Partnerships (henceforth, PPPs) in areas of cultural heritage management. A case study of Shandong Province shows how the state is still seeking to divest itself of economic complexities by turning management over to the private sector

(Flath 2002). PPPs in China usually imply outsourcing, concession and divestiture. On the managerial level, however, problems connected with the interaction of public and private enterprise are becoming more frequent, as usually each pursue separate goals (Gray 2015). The first 11 PPP pilots in the cultural sector include the construction and management of county-level cultural centres and the development of cultural tourism by constructing heritage parks and new museums. Museums are confronted with commercialisation of public history, which might lead to the commodification of cultural heritage (Falser and Juneja 2013).

In many parts of China, historical preservation and real estate investment have resulted in tourism gentrification (Liang and Bao 2015; Shin 2010; Zhao 2009). Tourism is becoming the main driving force in economic, social, cultural, and lifestyle transformations. One of the best-known private tourism corporations is Shenzhen OCT Tourism Development Co. Their slogan is 'Originating in real life and rising above it, discarding the dross and selecting the essential' (Liang and Bao 2015). In becoming national monuments, it is increasingly likely that archaeological sites will be transformed into large parks and lucrative tourist attractions (Leibold 2012; Murowchick 2013).

Furthermore, the value of heritage has been accepted and reassessed by the Chinese government, and UNESCO acknowledges Chinese preservation efforts, which are recognised on a global scale, bringing international prestige. The Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), connected to UNESCO, stresses the inherent value of heritage: '[t]he authorized heritage discourse focuses attention on aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that current generations 'must' care for, protect and revere so that they may be passed to nebulous future generations for their 'education', and to forge a sense of common identity based on the

past' (Smith 2006, p. 29). However, the efforts of preservation of history transform state authorities as caretakers of a national cultural heritage, and justify their means. It has been argued that these measures do preserve the 'universal' heritage of the past, while they simultaneously ignore present social realities (Shepherd 2009).

The commodification of cultural artefacts and the promotion of narratives of unbroken continuity in the development of Chinese civilisation within museum exhibitions also demonstrate that curatorship is still subject primarily to consideration of tourism and patriotism

rather than to current scholarly standards (Fiskesjö 2015). In many cases museums in China have to find a difficult balance between maintaining historical accuracy and achieving economic growth.

Such phenomena of managerial segmentation, cultural nationalism, commercialisation and commodification represent actual challenges for museums in China nowadays, and have led scholars to describe the country's 'museum boom' as an exaggerated form of 'musealisation', even using the pejorative term 'museumification' (Johnson and Florence 2013).

This article has provided an overview of Chinese policy in relation to museums, by exploring the current status of the museum system, the implementation of measures to adapt to market economy needs and to comply with government directives, and the resulting limitations.

In describing both successful new trends in museum policy as well as challenges they present, this paper provides a fresh perspective on the existing discussion on the Chinese museum system, and its role and impact on both domestic and international levels. The Chinese museum system responds to different domestic needs and combines strong international cultural policies. In the coming years, museums in China will develop further adapting to local market economy and national political directives, while they increasingly expand their influence and connections at an international level.

NOTES

1 The above-mentioned monographs and other research are symptomatic of the growing interest in the topic of museums in China in different academic fields.

2 The 'Chinese Dream' is a term that was coined by Chinese President Xi Jinping and became increasingly popular. It describes a set of personal and national ideals, which are required to build a prosperous society and realise national rejuvenation.

3 A 'government-organised non-governmental organisation' (GONGO) is an organisation that is set up or sponsored by a government in order to preserve state power, further its political interests, and mimic the civic groups and civil society at home, or promote its international or geopolitical interests abroad (see also Naim 2009).

4 The 'One Belt, One Road' (or, OBOR), in Chinese, is referred to as 一带一路, *yī dài yī lù*. More recently, Chinese authorities have adopted the wording 'Belt and Road Initiative' in English.

5 In Chinese, the role of museums as 'basis of patriotic education' is written as 爱国主义教育基地, *aiguó zhuyi jiaoyu jidi* (SACH 2015a), where the term 'patriotism' is literally translated as 'love for the country' (爱国, *aiguó*).

6 The foreword of the China Principles was published in 2015 and was written by the former President of ICOMOS China and Deputy Director of SACH China, Tong Mingkang.

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